*"Truth Is One, Men Call It By Various Names."* ---RIG VEDA

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# Message of the East

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## SPRING ISSUE

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# LIFE AFTER DEATH

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# Message of the East

"And behold the glory of God of
Israel came from the way of the East."
—*Ezekiel*
"Light shall come again from the East."
—*Tyndall*

VOLUME XLII 1953 NUMBER 1


Remain always strong and steadfast in your own faith, but eschew all bigotry and intolerance. Be not like the frog in the well. The frog in the well knows nothing bigger and grander than its own well. So are all bigots; they do not see anything better than their own creeds.

Dispute not. As you rest firmly on your own faith and opinion, allow others also the equal liberty to stand by their own faiths and opinions. By mere disputation you will never succeed in convincing another of his error. When the grace of God descends on him each one will understand his own mistakes.

So long as the bee is outside the petals of the lily, and has not tasted the sweetness of its honey, it hovers round the flower, emitting its buzzing sound; but when it is inside the flower, it noiselessly drinks its nectar. So long as a man quarrels and disputes about doctrines and dogmas, he has not tasted the nectar of true faith. When he has tasted it, he becomes quiet and full of peace.

As a mother, in nursing her sick children, gives rice and curry to one, and sago arrow-root to another, and bread and butter to a third, so the Lord has laid out different paths for different men, suitable to their natures.

When water is poured into an empty vessel, a bubbling noise ensues; but when the vessel is full, no such noise is heard. Similarly the man who has not found God is full of vain disputations about the existence and attributes of the Godhead. But he who has seen Him silently enjoys Divine Bliss. —*Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna*

# UNIVERSAL MESSAGE

Those who give themselves up to the Lord do more for the world than all the so-called workers. One man who has purified himself thoroughly accomplishes more than a regiment of preachers. Out of purity and silence comes the word of power. —*Swami Vivekananda*

If thou consider what thou art within thee, thou wilt not care what men talk of thee. Man looketh on the countenance, but God on the heart. Man considereth the deeds, but God weigheth the intentions.

—*Imitation of Christ*

If I cannot do great things, I can do small things in a great way. —*James Freeman Clarke*

The serene and blessed mood
In which the affections gently lead us on,
Until---the breath of this corporeal frame
And even the motion of our human blood
Almost suspended---we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul,
While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the things of life.

—*Wordsworth*

Growth is slow when roots are deep. But those who light a little candle in the darkness will help to make the whole sky aflame. —*S. Radhakrishnan*

To die like a saint one must have lived like a saint. In one of the most beautiful sentences ever uttered in *extremis,* the great philosopher, Plotinus, dying in A.D. 270, said: "Now I shall endeavor to make that which is divine in me rise up to that which is divine in the universe."

—*Selected*

# LIFE AFTER DEATH

*By Swami Paramananda*

Before we can study life after death,we must know something about life itself. Often and often people ask, "Can you prove the existence of the soul after death? Can it be proved by scientific means?" Suppose it cannot; what difference does it make? Shall we take as our measure of final truth a science which has not reached its ultimate? Shall we limit ourselves to a materialistic form of reasoning which cannot go beyond its own field? The immortal Self cannot be proved by material means. We can prove the existence of a tree, or a plant, or a table, or a chair—things of that nature—or perhaps certain things which come within the range of chemistry; but when we try to prove something pertaining to the spiritual essence, the only method that we can employ is the spiritual method. A man of spiritual genius proves it to himself and then stands up before the whole world and proclaims his conviction; with dauntless courage he sings of the undying nature of the soul. A materialistic mind, however, cannot conceive it. The materialist says, "But we do die!" He feels the pain of the body; he sees the changing phenomena all about him and accepts these varying conditions as more real than that which is perceived through spiritual sight.

It is very difficult for anyone who sees someone die to believe that he does not go altogether into oblivion. But death does not mean annihilation. A person who does not live the right kind of life, who through evil and treachery gets into a difficult position and sees no way out, for such a man to go and commit suicide may seem a simple way of escape. But man cannot escape from the great Law of

life. What he would destroy is only the perishable part; the Real within him is imperishable. It is not that an invisible Providence is holding a rod or a threat over him, forcing him to give an account of what he has done or thought. No; he himself must give an account to himself. Until we are able to satisfy our own finer more spiritual nature, we shall not be freed from the bonds that bind us. Therefore we should study life, not because it is something thrust upon us that we cannot avoid, but because its study is a tremendous factor in our progress.

For the wise, life after death is an absorbing subject. Just as a man who has partially accomplished a certain work, looks forward to the time when he may give the finishing touches, in the same way, those who live this life worthily, look forward to the next step with happy expectancy and with no thought of fear. It is not fear that saves us from the pang of death or from any affliction. Life after death is not what some of the orthodox would have us believe, either an ascent into heaven or a falling into endless perdition. The life that we shall experience after death will be in no way contrary to our life here. If it were, we would find outselves out of place: we would want to escape from it. In spite of all the wonderful dreams we have of enjoying a heavenly realm, unless our present life with all its thoughts and associations tends in the same direction, we shall have no point of contact with any such heaven. In fact, were we forced into an atmosphere like that, we should be very lonely, just as here in this world, a person of vulgar taste, if placed in the midst of that which is fine, which represents the highest culture, would feel completely out of place. Take some unlettered, wholly ignorant person to a Museum of Fine Arts and you will see that he will be bored by

it. So it is with our after-life. We may have all sorts of dreams about enjoying heaven, but unless through our life and conduct here, we have made ourselves harmonious with those heavenly ideals, we cannot be happy there. It would be impossible.

Life after death is connected with life here. One person goes into darkness there because he has lived in darkness here. Another person goes into light there because his life here has been full of light. Death holds no dread for him. It means no radical change. He goes with smiling face, carrying a light in his heart, and he finds greater light because of that light which is already within him.

We do not gain anything accidentally. That is one of the things we must understand. Our whole conduct should be based on it. Our good fortune does not come by chance, nor does our ill fortune. But it is not true that we are unable to overcome those disadvantages with which we may have been born. People who are in earnest, today overcome and tomorrow have the freedom to go on with the next step in their evolution. Life after death is interesting because life here is interesting. Life is sacred. It descends from Godhead. We must understand this and make it part of our consciousness.

In the Vedic philosophy the only sin is to fall into ignorance, for in this way a man loses his spiritual point of view and becomes selfish and cruel. His first duty is to try to relate himself with his Source. When some spiritual being comes and tells us that we are verily that which is undying, eternal, we at first are not able to grasp it. It is too stupendous. We say, "Does this mean that I am going to lose my individuality? I am so-and-so. I am from such-and-such a family." So we go on, clinging to this false conception, not only creating bondage

and unhappiness for ourselves, but for others.

Whoever makes a study of the invidious conditions of life will find that they rise from only one cause—man's selfish egotistic notions concerning life and living. Man limits himself instead of unlimiting himself. Instead of feeling himself a part of the cosmic universe, he creates a narrow circle, and when anything fails to come within the radius of that circle, immediately he is at war with it. As a result, he has no peace, he has no happiness; he is impoverished by his own conduct, by his own conception of existence.

Spiritual life provides a wider scope. The man of Spirit does not weigh things merely on the scales of the physical. This body is a garment, and he looks on it as such. Perhaps the garment wears out. Then he can put on one that is fresh and new. Also this body is a dwelling place. We know that the house and the one who dwells in the house are not the same. We make a house beautiful and appropriate so that it will be comfortable and convenient to live in, but never for a moment do we think that the house is all in all. For this reason, a man should not sell everything pertaining to his spiritual being in order that his house of flesh may be more perfect. If he does, he makes a tragic mistake, "For what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" Christ said this to His followers. But how many people are there who are ready to answer this question, who can take in its meaning and really stand up and say, "Yes, what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

Man invariably is looking for that which he thinks is beneficial for his physical being and advantageous to

his immediate situation, and seems to be indifferent to the fact that in the process the soul has become an indistinct factor. The veil of ignorance has fallen so thickly before his eyes that the Spirit within seems almost like an unreality. Therefore death overpowers him. When the shadow of death falls upon him, it seems a terrible calamity. He feels he is going to lose everything; he himself is going to be swallowed up—annihilated. The trouble is, he has no clear avenue opening upon his real being, so that he is unable to perceive that it is indestructible and undying. Those Vedic seers, to whom Spirit was a reality, were able to stand up, even in the face of disease and death and sing their Song of the Soul: "Sword cannot pierce me; fire cannot burn me; water cannot wet me; air cannot dry me!" You may say, "That is not true. Not for me. Sword does pierce me; fire can burn me!"

Here is our chance for higher discrimination. Are we bound by our physical consciousness, our appetites and feelings? Or have we something better and deeper and more perfect in our nature? We must first investigate before we reject these concepts. An ignorant mind accepts and rejects on hearsay, but not the wise. The mind which is keen and intuitive never rejects anything without first examining it thoroughly for himself. That should be our standard.

Religion is something which we evolve. It is a part of our existence. It is not anything that we merely take from some Bible, no matter what Bible it is that gives it to us. All the beautiful teaching that we have read from our Scriptures, how much of it has actually taken hold of our life, so that we can say with positive affirmation, "It is true! I know it to be true; therefore there is nothing

that can thwart me." Only that which comes through our own deep, sincere, spiritual searching can become part of our life and being.

In order to know something in regard to life after death, we must make a thorough study of life here and now. If this present life is lived in accordance with our higher thought, the thought that we know is true, then the next step will be as clear as the daylight before us. If, however, we have the fanciful idea that no matter what our thought or conduct may be, we shall inherit heaven after we die, we are bound to meet with disappointment. The life to come depends entirely on what we have done with the life here. The Law of Compensation, the Law of *Karma,* as it is called in Hindu philosophy, contains the explanation of this. Why do we have such tremendous diversity, variety, inequality, seeming differences? Some say that God Almighty is responsible for it. That infinite Heart of Love does not create it. It is we who provide the materials for our destiny. We sow seeds in the harvest field of our life, and reap the harvest, here and hereafter, when the harvest is due. Suicidal tendency cannot help us to escape. We possess the instrument by means of which we can progress, go forward on our path; but we, out of shortsightedness, negelect to use it.

Now it is good that we should take care of our life here, but it must be with understanding. By taking care of this life we shall have a wider scope for usefulness. We shall be able to lend a helping hand to others who are groping and struggling to get out of the darkness. Merely attaching importance to the body, however, does not enable us to keep it forever. Many people believe that by planning they will be able always to maintain this body

in a healthy condition. But no one has succeeded in doing this indefinitely. We cannot overcome death merely by taking care of this flesh, because this flesh is a combination of earth, water, air, ether—such materials—and all combinations in time fall apart. But the Real which holds them together cannot die. Should not the human heart, then, desire to know something of It?

Merely identifying ourselves with bodily conditions does not give us the true concept of life. When man discovers the living Soul within, he has no more wish to harm anyone. How could he? His realization brings him fulfilment. No longer does he have to reach out here and there for pleasure and gratification, since he has within himself that kingdom of heaven promised in all the great scriptures of the world. What is the kingdom of heaven? Do we know anything about it? Have we tried to know anything about it? When we do attain this knowledge, then perhaps we shall have the answer as to what happens after we leave the body. It will all depend upon what we deserve. Do we fall into a condition of sleep? Do we go to heaven, or to a place of perdition? The answer will lie in what we have thought and done here. We cannot escape from anything, and nothing can be taken away from us.

Suppose your life comes to an end before you have completed your task or attained the highest point of accomplishment, does that mean that you have lost all hope of advancing? Never. Within this body there is another body called the subtle body, composed of mind, intelligence and the sense of ego. That subtle body we cannot perceive with the physical senses, but the individual carries with him the character which he has formed by his thoughts and his deeds. He has a complete

record of everything he has done and thought, and in accordance with that, he takes his next step. As he has done, so must he accept. But he has the power also to undo. Suppose there is something undesirable hanging over us, should we sit in a corner and be despondent, weighed down by a sense of doom? On the contrary, we should lift up our head with understanding and prayerful attitude, with real strength, and faith in our innate wisdom, then we can overcome everything. What we make we also have the power to unmake. That is what life teaches us.

Life after death can be a great blessing to us. As I have said, one who has made his life fruitful today, looks forward to tomorrow, that he may accomplish an even greater amount. The same way it is with a soul whose life, through earnestness and sincerity, has been productive of good, he looks forward to the life beyond in order that he may do even more. When love dawns in one's heart—love of service, love of doing good to others—one never feels any loss. That is the way it is with those who have freed themselves from ordinary physical appetites and self-seeking. Their days are happy. They find that God is using them—their hands, their feet, their mind, and all their faculties—such souls know that when they are taken away from this sphere, God is going to place them somewhere else where they can be of greater use, greater service.

Life is never ended by death. Death has no power over life. It can never bring annihilation. We must rise above these false concepts. We must rise from the grave of ignorance in which we have been buried. This is the real import, the true significance of resurrection. Where ever we are placed, if we are imbued with the right concept of life, we shall be filled with the joy of God.

Death should not bring any grief. The idea of grief comes through attachment. If you really love a person dearly and are interested in the welfare of that person, you will give him freedom; you will be happy in the freedom of that soul. We cannot achieve this attitude through calculation, but when we have the understanding that God is all, that through His Law He is ruling over all things and that there is nothing outside of the divine consciousness, then we have no more fear, no sense of loss. We live in Him, move in Him, have perfection of life in Him. When that understanding dawns, then we destroy the distance, the gulf, between life and death. They become one. When that realization comes, we transcend all duality—darkness and light, good and evil, life and death. We recognize but one fact: Existence Absolute, Knowledge Absolute, Bliss Absolute. That is man's real nature.

When we have found our home in God, we become part of Him. Then, like the sage in India, in the face of death, we can sing: "I am that undying, unchanging Eternal, which nothing has power to destroy!" Not even a Saviour can convey the import of this until it dawns within our own heart.

People often say, "Why did not Christ, why did not Buddha solve this question of death for us once for all?" It can be solved only by the individual. There is no one who can eat for you and give you the benefit of the nourishment. There is no one who can drink for you and quench your thirst. Thus also when we are hungry and thirsty for spiritual food and drink, we must be willing to take it and eat it and drink it. When we have learned to drink from the fountain head of spiritual wisdom, then alone can this thirst be quenched, and we shall know real satisfaction and peace.

# A PROMISE

*By Ethelwing Webster*

Once more the cycle of the Crucifixion is turning the thoughts of the Christian world to that Blessed One who came centuries ago to show the way of life, and teach the Mysteries of the Resurrection to a world blinded by ignorance, and the sad delights of selfishness and human cruelty.

There is a strange old legend which tells us that at the time of the Crucifixion the lovely dogwood tree had been the size of the other great trees in the forest, and was so rugged that it was chosen to be fashioned into the cross for the crucifixion of our Lord.

To be used for such a cruel purpose! What a tragic fate! The tree cried in agony and shame as the Christ was nailed upon its brown wooden breast.

Jesus, with His love and compassion for all that suffer, and feeling the sadness of the cross, said to it: "Because of your agony for My pain, never again shall the dogwood tree grow large enough to be used as a cross; henceforth it shall be slender and delicate. Its blossoms shall form a cross, two long and two short petals, and in the center there will be nail-prints, brown with rust, and stained with red. In the center of the flower will be a crown of thorns, and all who see it will remember."

As we hurry along the forest trails where the dogwood blooms in the spring sunshine, let us pause, as at some holy and sacred shrine, and partake of the blessing and benediction of this ancient tree, and let us remember the compassion of the Divine Christ for all living things, even in His hour of agony on the cross made from the dogwood tree.

# A TRIBUTE TO HOLY MOTHER

*By Sister Daya*

(An address delivered in the Temple of the Universal Spirit, La Crescenta, California, on the Holy Mother's birthday anniversary, December 7, 1952)

One hundred years ago, in Jayrambati, a small village in West Bengal, a girl child was born whose life and character one day would cause men to declare: "In her is seen why there is hope for man."

Her family was of the Brahman caste, rich in spiritual tradition but poor in worldly goods. In these small Indian villages, people dwell for the most part in unpretentious mud huts, thatched with palm and surrounded by a few fruit trees and some acres of rice. Also there is a cow or two, the number depending on the financial status of the family. Even the life of the most prosperous villager however, would seem a life of poverty here in the West where luxuries have become necessities.

The members of this particular household, although humble from the worldly point of view, held as a great treasure the Brahminical ideal and took very seriously the obligations of their birth and status as teachers of things spiritual to their motherland. Thus the little girl grew up under the influence of India's ancient spiritual culture, which she saw exemplified in her parents, in every act of their daily living. Even her games were modeled after the worship in the temple, which she brought down to the scale of her small, handmade dolls.

The name of this little girl was Saradamani Devi, and from the very beginning she shone with inward purity, humility and a profound integrity. As far as anyone could foresee, she was destined to lead the ordinary life of the average villager, which meant marriage, children, endless household duties, and seclusion, for at that time

the custom of *purdah* largely prevailed. She was destined for something far greater however, although marriage, household duties and seclusion were to be included in her lot. In fact, hers was to be a strange and exalted destiny which by its very nature would glorify everything that she was called upon to do.

Eighteen years before her birth in Jayrambati, a little boy had been born in the neighboring village of Kamarpukur whose life was to be linked with hers in perhaps the strangest union in recorded history. His traditions, caste, spiritual and material surroundings were largely the same as hers. He too brought the gods into his games and drew all hearts to him by his sweetness, purity, innate perception and spontaneous gayety. The name of this boy was Gadadhar, but the world was to know him as Sri Ramakrishna, one of the supreme spiritual teachers of all time. Even in his early boyhood he had exhibited a strong tendency toward mystic contemplation. More than once during his school days, he had been rapt in divine ecstasy, while the wisdom that flowed from his young lips amazed even the most learned.

At the age of sixteen, Gadadhar joined his elder brother in the city of Calcutta where he became a priest in the great Temple of Dakshineswar on the Ganges, dedicated to the Mother of the Universe. Here the fire of spiritual yearning, already alight in his heart, was fanned to a white heat by the worship he performed before the Image of the Great Mother. Day by day it flamed higher and higher till it threatened to consume his very being. He became unaware of the things around him. In his intense longing to realize the Mother, he went weeks on end without sleep. Had friendly hands not put food between his lips he would have died of starvation. People thought that

he had gone mad. Only one or two perceived that it was a divine madness. Even his own family, hearing of all this, feared for his reason and for his life. Finally they arranged for him to come to Kamarpukur, believing that once there in the familiar surroundings of his old home he would rid himself of the strange spell which possessed him.

The hope seemed to be justified. He regained some of his former gayety and boyhood ways, but there remained his meditative habits and inborn mystic tendencies. Therefore his family, after long consultation, decided that marriage might prove the cure for all his ills and establish him on a firm and normal basis. To the surprise of everyone, he did not reject the idea. He accepted it, but with one condition; that the elected bride should be no other than a little girl named Saradamani Devi, living in the neighboring village of Jayrambati. That little girl was now five years of age while Sri Ramakrishna was more than twenty-three years old.

Child marriage at that time was the universal custom in India, but it amounted actually to nothing more than a betrothal, since the bride went back to her parents after the ceremony and did not rejoin her husband till she had reached more mature years. This was to be the case also with Sri Ramakrishna and Saradamani Devi. The little bride returned to her family home and Sri Ramakrishna once more took up his duties in the temple at Dakshineswar. What fills one with amazement is the divine prescience which caused him to know that this one little girl among all girls possessed the qualifications which would carry her beyond the claims of ego and make her truly a worthy companion to him in his mighty quest for ultimate Truth.

Eight years passed by, during which Sri Ramakrishna's desperate yearning did not abate. Once more he sought the healing atmosphere of Kamarpukur, where he was joined by his young wife who no doubt had only the vaguest memory of that ceremony in which she had been joined to this stranger. She must have wondered what nature of man this was of whom people had whispered such strange things. She found him to be a man of supreme wisdom whose extraordinary spirituality captured her whole being; for her then, as he was to be till her dying day, the great master—the incomparable teacher—a veritable incarnation of Deity. With tenderness and profound understanding, he instructed little Sarada in all the spiritual possibilities of life as well as in the art of outer living. In later years, referring to these days, Sarada said she felt as if a pitcher of bliss were kept in her heart. After a three months' sojourn, Sri Ramakrishna again returned to Calcutta and Sarada once more sought the shelter of her family home.

Her position was a peculiar one: married but not married, abiding with her parents while her husband practised strange spiritual disciplines in the city of Calcutta. She did not, however, react to this situation as the average young girl might have done. She showed no signs of restlessness or embarrassment, but moved through her daily tasks with a serene dignity, seemingly possessed with an innate patience and an unshakable faith, which gave her the power to wait without fretfulness for the unfoldment of her life story.

In those years of waiting, how did she occupy herself? With the simplest tasks we are told. In a village household there are many little things to do: meals to be cooked, rooms to be swept, cattle to be fed, rice to be gathered. She

would go out in the fields to carry food to the men who were bringing in the harvest. Simple duties; what we would call peasant chores in a European country. These she performed with a perfectly humble, gentle spirit and the innate strength that was to manifest all through her life.

With the passing of the years, the rumors concerning Sri Ramakrishna increased tenfold. Rumors, more and more rumors! Sarada's husband, it was said, was really insane. There must be something wrong with the mind of a man who would lie on the ground at close of day and weep because another day had passed and he had not realized the Infinite Mother; had not yet really known the Divinity he was called upon to worship in the temple. Even in that worship, it was said, he did not follow the prescribed rules. He would forget what he was worshipping and place the flower offering on his own hands or feet as if he had transferred the Deity to his own person.

The villagers, though familiar with religious forms and usages, did not know what to make of this strange behavior. Pitying looks were cast upon Sarada Devi, wed to a mad husband, left stranded and forgotten in her parents' home. Some would have felt this humiliation bitterly, but not Sarada Devi. She carried herself with poise and serenity, though pondering constantly over these whispers that reached her ears. Remembering the wonderful and illumined being at whose feet she had sat, she could not believe that he was crazed or demented; but if he really had lost his reason, then as his wife she felt that her place was by his side to help him in his trouble. If he did not know what he was doing, then she must be there to do things for him.

Sarada Devi was eighteen at that time; no longer a

little girl. So when she announced to her family that she was going to Calcutta, she met with no opposition. However there was an eighty mile road to traverse on foot, leading through wild, robber-infested country. For this reason, Sarada Devi's father insisted on accompanying her. They joined a group of pilgrims who were going the same way, and thus banded together, accomplished the journey in safety, although Sarada Devi had to stop off at a small village toward the end of the journey when she came down with fever and was ultimately carried into Calcutta on a palanquin.

Her father's protection was no doubt needed, but on a later date when Sarada Devi was stranded and alone on that same road, the divinity in her own soul protected her. On that occasion, she had been too exhausted to keep up with her fellow travelers who, fearful of being caught in such dangerous country after dark, finally yielded to her unselfish urging and hurried on without her. As she stood alone in the gathering gloom, utterly weary and bewildered, she saw a dark and evil-looking man approaching her who shouted to her in a harsh voice. Behind him, she discerned another figure, that of a woman. As it was the country of dacoits, she had little doubt that these two were planning to rob her.

Although Sarada Devi was frightened, she stood her ground and without guile or calculation, called to the man, addressing him as "father," and appealed to him as his own daughter might have done. Then going up to the woman and taking her by the hand she said: "Mother, I am your daughter, Sarada. I am in great difficulty. Fortunately, father and you have come here, otherwise I do not know what I would have done." There was something so utterly childlike, so true in this appeal,

that the hearts of the couple melted. Not only did they not injure her, but they gave her loving care, provided her with food and a bed to sleep on, and conducted her safely to a meeting place with her companions. Later on, they brought sweets to her at Dakshineswar and were greeted by the Master as if he were truly their son-in-law. "My surmise is," Sarada Devi stated, "that though these people are now good and gentle, my dacoit 'father' must have committed many highway robberies."

It must have been a strange meeting indeed, that which took place between the God-intoxicated saint of Dakshineswar and the wife he had not seen since she was a little girl. Only the meeting of Lord Buddha with his wife Yashodara, following his years of spiritual striving, can be compared with it. Unlike Yashodara, however, Sarada Devi made no personal demand upon her husband. Quite simply she presented herself before him, and quite simply he acknowledged her coming with the words: "So at last you are here! Would that my Mathur* were alive to look after you!" An heir as he was to India's great ascetic traditions, he did not act in the prescribed manner and repudiate the claim her presence made upon him; neither did he allow it to turn him away from his lofty purpose. Like a child, he admitted that there were obligations which, if she desired, he must and would fulfill. But he said: "You see, I have come to look upon all women as manifestations of the Divine Mother, how then can I regard any one woman in any other relation?" To this she replied: "I ask nothing of you; I want nothing save the privilege of dwelling near you, of serving you and learning from you."

On this basis, she remained at Dakshineswar, not as

* Mathur Babu, son of Rani Rashmani, the builder of the Dakshineswar temple.

his wife but as his spiritual consort, living in the only place available, the Nahabat or Concert House—a small dwelling set apart for the temple musicians—which she shared with Chandra Devi, Sri Ramakrishna's old mother. It was anything but a cheerful habitation, for its tiny, restricted quarters were shielded from the public gaze by long bamboo shades which shut out most of the light and air. Since Sarada Devi, both by nature and from custom, avoided mingling with the public, this meant that most of her waking hours were spent in semi-darkness. For one who had passed the years of her early life under the open sky of her native village, this confinement must have amounted to a severe austerity. Yet she never complained nor showed the least sign of grievance.

As for Sri Ramakrishna, he moved as the Spirit moved him. Occasionally, he would draw Sarada Devi to him and again her cup of bliss would overflow with the blessing of his presence. At these times, he instructed her in things practical and spiritual. "This included everything from housekeeping to the knowledge of Brahman. He taught her how to trim a lamp, how to behave toward people according to their different temperaments, and how to conduct herself before visitors. He instructed her in the mysteries of spiritual life—prayer, meditation, *japa*, deep contemplaton and *Samadhi*. The first lesson that Sarada Devi received was, 'God is everybody's beloved, just as the moon is dear to every child. Everyone has the same right to pray to Him. Out of His grace He reveals Himself to all who call upon Him. You, too, will see Him if you but pray to Him."*

* From the foreword of the "Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna," translated by Swami Nikhilananda, Ramakrishna—Vivekananda Center, New York, N. Y.

Following those days of outer contact, she would go back to the Concert House, and he would not see her again sometimes for weeks. During those long periods of separation, the care of Chandra Devi, the old mother, helped her to forget the yearning of her heart. But Chandra Devi soon passed away and then her loneliness was intensified by the empty, silent rooms of her small dwelling.

Her great comfort during these periods was to stand at a little window in the Concert House, which overlooked the path leading to the *Panchavati* or Five Trees, beneath which Sri Ramakrishna was wont to sit in meditation. Just the passing glimpse of his countenance would compensate her for many hours of watching. Following his mother's death, however, he unwittingly denied her this solace. This she confided to Sister Devamata during the latter's sojourn in India. As if he could not bear to look at the Concert House, empty of his mother's presence, he would draw his *chaddar* across his face as he passed by, not realizing the eyes of devotion which gazed longingly toward him; or maybe realizing, but denying her this satisfaction because of a deeper spiritual purpose which he had in mind.

There was no rebellion in the Holy Mother's words as she described this time of waiting; the treasure already hers, she felt, was worth any sacrifice. Furthermore, she was possessed of a humility which sprang not from self-depreciation but from a profound selflessness. She said that at that time, looking up at the sky, she would repeat a prayer which she had uttered many time during her childhood: "O God, there are dark spots even on the moon, but make my character spotless."

Sarada Devi's life was not marked by any great

dramatic happenings which would go to make a thrilling article for the objective West. The highlights of her existence were of such an exalted spiritual nature that they would convey nothing to minds engaged merely in outer activities and for which the material world alone spelled reality. During the Master's lifetime, she cared for his needs, wherever possible, and prepared his food. Especially during his last illness she was in constant demand, for she alone seemed able to cook the food he could eat.

She passed so quietly and unobtrusively about her duties, that the Master's devotees, while giving her respect, took no special note of her, and it was not until after Sri Ramakrishna's passing that her own spiritual grandeur became manifest to them. Then these disciples gradually turned to her as to a guiding light in the midst of the darkness which seemed suddenly to have engulfed them.

It was told of Girish Chandra Ghose, the great Bengal dramatist and devoted disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, that when his mighty Master died, he wandered like a lost spirit, feeling that there was no one left on earth capable of easing his sorrow. Finally one of his brother disciples challenged him. "Why should you feel so?" he asked. "There is the Holy Mother." Girish admitted surprise. He had naturally always revered this quiet, self-effacing woman, but he had been so absorbed in his Master that he had failed to recognize her authentic spiritual stature. Now he awoke, as it were, and sought her out. He stated that the moment he entered her presence, all his pain, all his agony, was washed away and he felt restored as if Sri Ramakrishna himself were there before him. Thus for Girish too, she became the veritable living expression

of the Divine Mother with whom Sri Ramakrishna's spirit had ever been identified.

Even Swami Vivekananda, who became the leader of the band of disciples at the Master's death, acknowledged the Holy Mother's God-given power. Before he would embark for America on his first trip to the Western world, he had first to go to Holy Mother to receive her sanction and her blessing.

Yet she, no less than all the others, must have felt crushed beneath the weight of their common loss. It was said that at the time, following the Indian custom, she was on the point of removing her bracelets, but before she could actually do so, Sri Ramakrishna appeared to her and said in effect, "What are you doing? I have not gone away. I have only passed from one room to another." This helped to bear in upon her sorrowing heart the truth she had always known—that life is eternal. It was, however, the need in the hearts around her that drew the sting from her own grief and helped her to assume the great ministry left to her by her Master.

The living presence of Sri Ramakrishna had been such a tremendous fact in the lives of his devotees, that when it was suddenly removed, it seemed to them as if a door had closed, shutting them away forever from the light and bliss which had emanated from him. Even for the Holy Mother this must have been true. Therefore the assurance which her vision of him brought her served to dispel the temporary darkness and liberate her powers for the solace of others. Immediately her faith burned high once more and she went tirelessly about the tasks of her new mission.

Her mind seems constantly to have soared beyond the level of earth consciousness. From her own words

one gathers that she frequently enjoyed visions of deep spiritual import, and that following Sri Ramakrishna's death, she was constantly aware of his presence and guidance. "Whatever might be the significance of these uncommon experiences, the Holy Mother, as we have seen, was most simple and human in her everyday life, without the least touch of mysteriousness or occultism about her. Excepting the wisdom she manifested, there was nothing out-of-the way about her. Her tendency was always to encourage the disciples to seek for knowledge, devotion and dispassion, and not to be always waiting for visions and occult phenomena. According to her, if psychic experiences came, it was well and good. But, as she once said to a disciple who felt sorry for not having had any vision, these experiences were not of much consequence. They were only by-products of the spiritual life. Its essence was in something else. As to her conception of true spiritual evolution, she once said in her simple and yet expressive way, "What else does one obtain by the realization of God? Does one grow a pair of horns? No. One's mind becomes pure, and through the pure mind, knowledge and illumination are awakened."*

* See Nikhilananda, The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna.

*To Be Concluded*

If you are able to establish God in your heart, by means of spiritual practice done with intense sincerity, discrimination, dispassion and love, you will realize Him and see Him everywhere, within and without, and in all things. There remains no longer anything else in the universe for such a one to gain or to desire; his life is filled with bliss. This is the only true aim of human life. All else is nothing but chasing shadows. —*Swami Virajananda*

# FROM ACROSS THE BLACK WATER

*Letters from Gayatri Devi*

## I.

[Written to the friends and members of the Ananda Ashramas in Cohasset, Massachusetts, and La Crescenta, California during her present trip to Europe and India. Gayatri Devi who, as this magazine goes to press, is still abroad, expects to return to America sometime in May. She will then resume her active duties in connection with both the Eastern and Western Centres.]

November 6, 1952

Dear Ones across the ocean:

Exactly a week ago today we left our beloved Ashrama and all of you, its fortunate dwellers. Still, it seems like a dream that we are really on our way to India. So complete is my identification with you that I find myself thinking of you and not of India. Each of you comes to mind daily, regularly, many times, and I respond in silent love or in prayer. There is strong longing in me to see you happy, united, harmonious, and contented in your life of dedication and service. Having chosen what brings fulfillment, you must be fulfilled. You know that depends upon you. I can pray on your behalf and exert an influence, but the rest must be done by you . . .

The send-off at the dock was touching. Our staterooms were filled with flowers and gift packages. Poor Mother! She could not keep back tears, waving good-by from the deck . . . The sailing took place promptly at noon of Saturday . . .

This ship is really luxurious. It offers comforts far beyond one's expectations. And O! the service! It is super-excellent. We are having a grand time attending the captain's party (we drink ginger ale and and chat with the chief engineer,) seeing moving pictures, and

so on. Are any of you shocked . . . ? But then all frivolity is counteracted by our nearness to the chapel. Every morning and evening worship is held there; we can hear the bells and singing from our cabins. I attended one service but was not impressed. The two chaplains carried it too mechanically, although the worshipers were sincere in their devotion. I would rather go to the chapel when no one is present.

The sea was quite perfect until Tuesday (the fourth) evening when millions of white caps appeared and slight rocking began. It continued throughout yesterday until this morning (Thursday). We took to our beds immediately and stayed there. Mother has not left hers even today, and has taken all her meals in the cabin, but not I. Every day has been bright with sunshine and mild in temperature. We throw open the door into the verandah, letting the air and light flood our rooms . . .

I wish I could invite you to Saturnia's dining hall for a meal. It is a sight to behold. In the centre a square counter, plus long tables below it, are adorned with whole turkeys, chickens, colorful large cuts of meat, salads, fruits, pastries, cakes and every kind of edibles of many varieties that you can imagine. On the menu one is free to choose from nineteen titles each, of numerous assortments . . .

My curiosity . . . led me into trouble and taught me a valuable lesson. Do you remember the passage in the *Gita,* "Dangerous are the senses; they even carry away forcibly the mind of a discriminative man, striving for perfection." I must have been that man who, tasting unusual flavors, picked up a bit of poison. It left me "doped" all day yesterday until night when, feeling violently ill, I was able to throw off the impurity. Today's diet has been strict; in fact desire for food is quite absent for the pre-

sent. What troubles me slightly is the enormous waste. It does not seem necessary.

. . . We passed the Azore islands this noon. The sight of land gave me a pleasant feeling. By nature I am not a seafaring person; the ground suits me better, especially the rocks of Cohasset or the hills of La Crescenta.

Am I homesick for U.S.A.? Not really. Kabir says, "If thy bonds be not broken in life, what deliverance can there be in death?" This is what I am saying to myself . . . For one who must aim at *sannyas*, bondage is harmful. Vivekananda says, "Fetters though of gold are not less strong to bind." Yes, mine are the golden fetters; nevertheless they are fetters. Pray for me that this pilgrimage to India may bring me back to you a freer person, ready to serve without entanglement and attachment . . .

You have a sacred charge—your own life consecrated to God's service. Remember this and take good care, using it toward noble and unselfish ends; keeping the Shrine alive with your devotion, making the Ashrama joyous and peaceful by your attitudes and actions . . . All these and more are a part of your self-chosen and holy obligations. Fulfill them happily, in humility and tolerance. May the Lord help you win as you strive toward His perfection, is my earnest prayer . . .

* * *

Gretz, France. November 17, 1952

Here we are across the Atlantic, and yet not very far from you. Distance between Paris and Los Angeles is about seven thousand miles by sea and land, but much less by air. However, for us who must live in the consciousness beyond time, space, and causation there can be only closeness with one another without a sense of separateness. Thus it is that I find myself communing with you

either in silence or in unspoken conversation, over and over again.

So often the desire arises to share with you some of the pleasant experiences of this trip. They are neither unusual nor spectacular, only human. Being very human myself I long to have you enjoy some of the sights that have satisfied my eyes or delighted the heart. So far there has been no exaltation of spirit through contact with man-made splendor. Historic monuments fill one with admiration for man but certainly cannot stir the spirit. Here Mother Nature has stronger influence. In her beauty and grandeur I can touch what my soul seeks most.

We arrived at Genoa on Thursday, the 13th. As the boat drew closer to the pier and we watched from our personal deck the many people who had come to receive their friends and relatives, I became conscious that there were no eager hearts awaiting our landing. At that point someone spoke in Hindi, a dark skinned man with "Interpreter" written on the sleeve of his coat. He told us that he would like to help if the American Express agent whom we were expecting did not come. He stayed with us while we passed the Italian custom, police, and city authorities, attended to the luggage, took us to the American Express company's office, and recommended the hotel for the night . . . At the shipping office the interpreter from Karachi was most helpful, with his knowledge of Italian.

The most interesting feature of the excursion (on a sightseeing bus) in Genoa was the cemetery where people order the monuments over their graves many years before their death. Most of them are beautiful works of art in marble. Some tell stories in many figures. We could see only a few but there are more than six thousand memorials, arranged on two sides of wide, palatial, arched halls under which, also, were preserved coffins.

The oldest church in the city, that was damaged by the English bombs, and which held the relics of St. John the Baptist, was another point of interest in Genoa. In the chapel of St. John no woman is allowed, because of history. You certainly know. The Pope has the right to excommunicate anyone who disobeys the rule.

The journey between Genoa and Paris was of a duration of sixteen hours. We chose to ride by day in order to see the country, most of which was very beautiful. Miles and miles of Alps rose to the sky on either side of us; snowcapped high peaks, rugged granite cliffs, green slopes, tree-mounted hills, autumn tinged foliage, torrential streams, waterfalls and lakes—in every direction eyes met beauty that stilled one's spirit and aroused mood for worship. At Modane, a border station of some altitude, between Italy and France, the winter greeted us in its white robe. There the grounds were heavily covered with snow, and men were walking around in high boots.

A French couple shared the second class apartment with us. Judging from their dress and personal habits I would say they represented the provincial type. The man knew a few words of English. Strangely, we were able to communicate with each other quite frequently. They were most friendly and considerate. Although the train was heated, Mother felt the cold. There was neither hot nor drinking water for the passengers. Meals were served in the dining car, and food was available at various stations.

On the platform in the Paris railroad station stood Sister Sarada and John (Ananta), two of Swami Siddheswarananda's disciples, who had come from Gretz, twenty miles away, to receive us. Sister Sarada was holding up a recent *Message* in her hand, so that we would

not miss her. You can well imagine how pleased we were to find them there, after ten o'clock at night and in a new city. The Ashrama car, a recent donation of a woman devotee, brought us safely out of the town into this quiet village where the Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre is located.

We met the Swami the next morning when he came to see us in the guest room, our present quarters. He reminded me that our Swamiji had introduced us at the Belur Math in 1935. Among many *sadhus* who were present then naturally I could not remember him.

We have felt so completely at home here. It is like being in La Crescenta or Cohasset. The atmosphere is the same and the life of the community follows a similar pattern. At 8:30 in the morning the worship bell rings. We climb up to the third floor Shrine room, remove our shoes and sit on rugs and cushions. Swami Siddheswarananda conducts the service in Hindu fashion, with ritual, chanting, and supplication. One of the younger men reads aloud a chapter of the *Gita* in French, on which the Swami comments for an hour or less. Since our attendance he has been explaining the *Gita* in English, now and then.

In the evening all come together again for *Arati*. It is so impressive to hear many voices repeating "Hari Om Ramakrishna" for fifteen minutes to half an hour. Since our coming there has been added a stream of songs, Bengali and Hindi. I become hoarse singing six to twelve songs at a time. Often Swami Siddheswarananda asks us to sing at the table after lunch and dinner. He feels inspired by these songs; they revive the memory of his life in the monastery.

He has given us such a hearty welcome. At his request we are staying here an extra day. I suppose his apprecia-

tion of Swami Paramananda creates a special bond between us. He tells everyone that it was the "Path of Devotion" which inspired him to become a Swami. He regards it as a priceless treasure among all religious works. His tenderness to Mother brings me a great deal of comfort.

There are nine resident members in the consecrated community; five young men, three young ladies, and the widow whom everyone calls "Mamaji." But the devotees and disciples are innumerable. Always at worship there are a number of new persons present, and in the dining room the three tables have seats for twenty-five or thirty. The Ashrama is never without a number of house guests.

We have met many friends of Vedanta and followers of Sri Ramakrishna. If only we could speak French more satisfactory contact would have been possible. Swami S. told us that Romain Rolland made Ramakrishna known in France. Even into the remotest village His name has entered. When the Swami lectures there, hundreds of people gather to hear. All day long people come here, for interviews or to attend the daily services, and on Sundays when there are no meetings except once in a month, many visit the place.

The community has the same work to do as in the American Ashramas: Shrine duty, tending to cows, rabbits, chickens and a horse (given only two days ago), making butter, cheese, gathering honey, and caring for the orchard and gardens. Sister Sarada is rarely seen in the Shrine; she is at her desk for hours, writing letters, transcribing lectures, wrapping packages, or bicycling to the village.

Wednesday, the 19th

Yesterday we went to Paris—the only time in five

days—to show Mother a little of the world's most beautiful city, and for brief shopping, railroad tickets, and so forth.

We were invited to lunch at the home of Dr. and Mrs. Valiensky; the husband, a throat and nose specialist; the wife a psychoanalyst; the devotees who have entertained other Swamis as well.

A snow storm greeted us in the going out of the village and again in the evening, while returning from Paris. Today the entire world around us is covered under a heavy blanket of snow. Swami S. said to have snow so early in the season is most unusual. France has it in March. Everyone is pleased about it however, because the ground needs the water.

Tomorrow we take the train for Frankfurt, arriving in the evening after a twelve hours of railroad journey. It seems like a dream that next Wednesday we will be in India, unless inclement weather interferes with the flight of airplanes.

I feel enriched by our few days of stay here. It has been like a stepping-stone toward pilgrimage in India; also reinforced spiritual preparation for starting a work in Germany. Swami Siddheswarananda impresses us as being a pure spirit, free of ambition, above pettiness, child-hearted and humble. He has given me encouragement and stimulus, not in words of praise but by silent understanding. I really am grateful that the urge to come here has brought about such good results . . .

In Europe or America or India, my course lies clearly before me. All life, all energy, all desire, seeks only one direction—to serve, to keep alive His name, and to wipe out the self in order to serve with greater purity. Who wants name, fame, self-glory, or praise? The Lord is the

only Doer. To be the least among His instruments is to achieve supreme glory and the deepest joy. In all humility I know and feel this.

* * *

[Excerpt from postcard written aboard a stratoliner en route to Delhi, India] :

We left Frankfurt last night under ideal conditions. Earth and heaven looked alike, dotted with millions of lights as we passed between the two. We stopped at Istanbul and Beirut for respite and refreshment.

Our visit to Frankfurt was most gratifying. Lord has His devotees everywhere. They treated us royally. I gave one lecture, one formal talk and held two services Sunday. Mr. Frederick, Swami Yotiswarananda's disciple, came from Hamburg and translated the talks from English into German on two occasions. Shortly we will reach Basra and by eight o'clock tonight, Delhi . . .

* * *

New Delhi, November 30, 1952

Here we are in India! For the first two days after our arrival it seemed like a dream, but now that I am more adjusted, all around seems more real. But let me assure you that there has been no difficulty in adjustment to the way of Indian life, the climate, food, tempo, or immediate environment. The lack of pressure and rush, the leisurely routine of a Hindu home, the absence of that undercurrent of nervous drive after something, so apparent in America, all have been very soothing by contrast. The whole atmosphere of India is different from any part of the world, America, Europe, or Asia, where I have recently been.

As I write, sitting on the sun-filled verandah of a home in this quiet residential section of the city, I can hear

children's voices, running water of the home next door, classical song and instrumental music on the radio close by, rustling of human feet on the dirt road, swishing of bicycles and occasional horn of the automobiles on the main street very near. All blend into a harmony befitting to India. In spite of my twenty-six years in the West I am utterly at home here. And ah! the simplicity, even the primitive ways of work, appeal to the real in my nature. How complicated and overburdened life can become even though the use of technical implements is at hand. I do appreciate the American comforts and conveniences but they are not for India, at least not in the same way. If only we could introduce a little of it and then draw a line, that would be ideal. Is this possible? That is the question.

The flight from Frankfurt was quite perfect, and in less than twenty-four hours. I found delight in every moment of the journey, watching out of the window. At night, cities we flew over looked like designed ornaments of shining diamonds. Overhead the sky, studded with millions of stars and galaxies, was the jeweled garment of Maharatri—Mother-night of Indian poet's description.

It seemed incredible that within brief intervals we were covering such vast distances. Now we were over the warm-toned sands of Syrian desert, then on the rippleless green of the Persian gulf. The colors held one speechless. I kept remembering Tagore's Bengali song, "In gold and silver, in green and blue, what Maya has He woven; Stepping beyond it, He Himself drowns me in the nectar of joy."

In all the ports—Istanbul, Turkey; Beirut, Lebanon; Basra, Iran; and Karachi, Pakistan—our giant bird, the double-decker plane, descended. The passengers paused for forty-five minutes, had a fleeting glimpse of the place

from the airport, some refreshments (except in Karachi), and the Constellation lifted its wings into the heights again. Apart from having to fill out papers at each entry there was no pointless technicality to observe for the transit travellers . . .

My first visit in India was to the Ramakrishna Mission Centre here. We went straight up to the Shrine room, which is upstairs; the worship had begun at forenoon. The bowl which Didi had taken, full of fruits, was returned with multicolored cut fruits, all *prasad* from the shrine. Here in India no one goes to a holy place empty-handed, nor returns without some blessed food. This is particularly true of all the Ramakrishna Mission establishments.

Swami Ranganathananda was extremely cordial. He is from south India, like the Swami in France. During our brief visit he remarked how deeply he is interested in the work we are carrying on in America. This afternoon we are planning to go to the Math again to hear him conduct the reading (or perhaps lecture) on the *Bhagavatam*.

Friday we attended *Arati,* or evening worship, at the temple of Kali. It is a remodeled shrine, primarily for the Bengalis who are worshippers of this aspect of Divine Mother. In spite of the mechanical way in which the priest conducted the ritual, I could not help but feel a certain exaltation. Men, women, and children came during the period, made obeisance, sat down, or went away after a brief pause. The atmosphere was there, the kind which can only be created by genuine devotion and faith in the living Presence.

The black marble statue of Mother, as well as of Shiva at Her feet in white marble, were disappointing from an aesthetic standpoint, as were almost all the marble figures in the new and very beautiful temples we visited later. It

(the Kali temple) had been built by Birla, the millionaire industrialist.

The Buddha temple has the old earthen statue which, now covered in gold leaf, is a real work of art. All along the walls are murals depicting various events of His life, in lovely colors; some are carved in marble. The entire edifice is in marble, also the figures of Mother Durga on the tiger, Sri Krishna, Lakshmi, Narayana, and Shiva. They are dressed in silk garments and adorned with gold and silver ornaments such as the human beings wear.

Monday, December 1. This is a holiday, due to a Sikh celebration. We hope to go to the Sikh temple sometime before leaving for Calcutta next week. Didi and I went to the Math last evening and had a friendly chat with Swami Ranganathananda. We missed the lecture on the *Gita* as someone had misinformed us about the time. He will preside next Tuesday evening at the meeting to be held at Kali Temple Hall when I will speak on "India's Service to America."

Tonight Mother, Didi, and myself are leaving for Hardwar, my first pilgrimage in India. It is there that the Ganges enters into the plains. Tomorrow morning when we arrive by train I will have my first glimpse of the Himalayas.

. . . My heart is constantly at His Feet, asking for your well-being and happiness. Be of good cheer always. Most lovingly . . .

Passage to more than India!
O secret of the earth and sky . . .
O day and night, passage to you!
O sun and moon and all you stars! . . .
Passage to you!

—*Walt Whitman*

# SCIENCE AND RELIGION

*By Leonard K. Beyer*

(A transcript from a public lecture, given before a distinguished philosophic and scientific body.)

The difficulty with which man struggles today in trying to harmonize his thinking about science and religion is due, I think, to two main causes. Modern science is so very complex, and yet so far from giving a final picture of the nature of reality, that it is very difficult to avoid a fragmentary view, very difficult to see the wholeness, the oneness, of the universe. Likewise religion, though a much older discipline, still speaks, through its priests and theologians, with a divided voice. True, if one goes to the sources, to the great founders of world religions, he finds essential unity; but modern man listens much more to contemporary and conflicting claims and interpretations which lose sight of the real meaning of religion, and thus his thinking in this field also leads to a fragmentary view, to seeing only partials where he should see wholes. This is one cause—the fact that our understanding in each field is partial and incomplete.

The second cause, which to some extent grows out of the first, is the fact that the scientists and the scientifically minded become so engrossed in the findings and implications of science that they tend to think that science is all there is and that it gives final answers to the great questions; while religionists and the religiously inclined become similarly engrossed in the hopes and the joys of religion and tend to think that religion is all there is and that it holds all the answers. Thus each fails to see that it is incomplete without the other, that each is but a part, and that true understanding can come only when man draws on the truths of both fields, as well as those de-

rived from other areas of thought, and welds them all together into a unified and harmonious whole. This is a large order, of course. But all that it requires, really, is an open and inquiring mind, and patience. Truly, there can be no conflict between science and religion if we understand aright, for both are part of the same universe and are derived from the same creative power.

Perhaps it may help us to understand the present situation if we briefly survey the historical background. As you know, during the Middle Ages the Church largely controlled the thought of Europe. Science was practically non-existent, save for what little survived, in garbled and distorted form, from the Greeks, mainly Aristotle. But in the late Middle Ages the mind of Europe stirred uneasily, stimulated by the work of the Arab thinkers and by the experimenting and writing of Roger Bacon, and in the Renaissance it burst its bonds. Then it was that Copernicus (1473-1543) taught that the sun, not the earth, is the center of the solar system, and Galileo (1564-1642) confirmed and consolidated the astronomical theories of Copernicus through the practical test of the newly-developed telescope. Galileo was a modern, far ahead of his time, and for the independence of his thinking was persecuted by the Inquisition, and finally forced, under threat of torture, to recant his teaching that the earth moves around the sun instead of the sun around the earth. Doubtless you all are familiar with the tradition that as he got up from his knees after the recantation, he murmured, "All the same it does move." Eventually, of course, the Church had to do the recanting and agree that the earth does in truth move around the sun.

This was the first great defeat of the Church at the hands of science. In the centuries that followed there

were others, including the controversy over evolution which seems to be still raging in some quarters. But in all the cases in which the Church was discomfited by a vigorous and fearless science, the unfortunate outcome was due, I venture to say, to the fact that she undertook to maintain a position which should never have been maintained, a position which fell far outside her legitimate field and which in truth belonged to science in the first place. Science is equally helpless and fails as dismally when it tries to invade the legitimate field of religion. I am thinking especially of psychiatry, which is often notably successful in helping to resolve minor mental and emotional conflicts, but which is utterly impotent in dealing with that hunger of the soul which only religion can satisfy. On the other hand, when working together and supplementing each other, psychiatry and religion can perform modern miracles, as we see in the work of the Marble Collegiate Church in New York, where Norman Vincent Peale cooperates with a staff of psychiatrists to meet both the mental and spiritual needs of the parishioners.

Now let us take a look at modern science. That it has provided man with an abundance of material well-being there is no denying. Our control of the natural environment, food supply and disease organisms through science is well-nigh complete, though because of faulty diet and manner of living, we do lay ourselves open to the inroads of degenerative disease. Transportation, communication, and entertainment through radio and television are far advanced. Furthermore, as a result of scientific research, we are coming to understand more adequately the nature of matter and energy and of life; and our understanding of the starry heavens around us is forever expanding.

Not so long ago we thought that the continual advance of science was bound to lead us into Utopia, and produce a heaven here on earth. We thought that science could and would remake not only man's environment, but man himself. Alas, the First and Second World Wars and now the Cold War have rudely disillusioned us, and we are coming to see that science is only a means to an end, not an end in itself. It does supply us with material needs and provide us with a method for probing the mysteries of time and space. It does not provide us with a philosophy, though certain philosophies have been profoundly influenced by science.

Indeed, the philosophical thinking which came to dominate the Western world toward the close of the 19th century, and which is still powerful, grew out of materialistic science. Materialism, mechanism, determinism are all derivatives of the view of science which prevailed throughout this period, and in one way or another, greatly influenced the development of Fascism, Nazism, and Communism. Men, indeed all living things, according to this view, are merely machines without free will; and there are no values except such as man arbitrarily sets up. Mind is some strange, inexplicable outgrowth of matter that has no real excuse for being, and of course there is no such thing as the soul. Views such as these are not the exclusive property of the Communists and erstwhile Nazis, but are found advanced in a number of our psychologies and philosophies, notably those of J. B. Watson and Bertrand Russell. W. T. Stace of Princeton and Max Otto of the University of Wisconsin think along these lines, also Corliss Lamont as shown in his book *The Illusion of Immortality*. George Gaylord Simpson in an otherwise excellent book called *The Meaning of Evolution*

says, "Man is the result of a purposeless and materialistic process that did not have him in mind. He was not planned."

However, a new wind has been blowing in science since early in the present century. The first faint breeze began to stir when Einstein wrote his *Special Theory of Relativity* in 1905. Later his *General Theory,* then the work of Bohr and Schrodinger and Eddington and Jeans and Max Planck—wave machines, quantum theory, nuclear physics, and the new views about the nature of gravity, time, space, and light—brought in a new era in science. The old materialism and mechanism were dead, and a new view of the nature of reality gradually took possession of science, which allowed room for free will, the mind, even the soul, and in the view of some scientists made the existence of these self-evident.

Revolutions of such great magnitude do not occur suddenly, and as yet there are many in the sciences who do not understand or accept the implications. The new developments occurred in physics where they worked a profound transformation. But biology and psychology which rest on and are derived from physics and chemistry, plus of course that extra and very strange factor which we call life, still lag behind, and are still largely dominated by mechanistic thinking. But there are signs that here, too, the new trend is making itself felt.

Here are some quotations which illustrate the statements of the last two paragraphs. The first is from *The Mysterious Universe,* that marvelous little book of Sir James Jeans, the English astronomer and physicist: "Thirty years ago we thought, or assumed, that we were heading towards an ultimate reality of a mechanical kind. It seemed to consist of a fortuitous jumble of atoms,

which was destined to perform meaningless dances for a time under the action of blind purposeless forces, and then fall back to form a dead world. Into this wholly mechanical world, through the play of the same blind forces, life had stumbled by accident. One tiny corner at least (and possibly several tiny corners) of this universe of atoms had chanced to become conscious for a time, but was destined in the end, still under the action of blind mechanical forces, to be frozen out and again leave a lifeless world.

"Today there is a wide measure of agreement, which on the physical side of science approaches almost to unanimity, that the stream of knowledge is heading towards a non-mechanical reality; the universe begins to look more like a great thought than like a great machine. Mind no longer appears as an accidental intruder into the realm of matter; we are beginning to suspect that we ought rather to hail it as the creator and governor of the realm of matter—not of course our individual minds, but the mind in which the atoms out of which our individual minds have grown and exist as thought.

"The new knowledge compels us to revise our hasty first impressions that we had stumbled into a universe which either did not concern itself with life or was actively hostile to it. The old dualism of mind and matter, which was mainly responsible for the supposed hostility, seems likely to disappear, not through matter becoming in any way more shadowy or insubstantial than heretofore, or through mind becoming resolved into a function of the working of matter, but through substantial matter resolving itself into a creation and manifestation of mind. We discover that the universe shows evidence of a designing or controlling power that has something in common

with our own individual minds—not, so far as we have discovered, emotion, morality, or aesthetic appreciation, but the tendency to think in the way, which, for want of a better word, we describe as mathematical. And while much in it may be hostile to the material appendages of life, much also is akin to the fundamental activities of life; we are not so much strangers or intruders in the universe as we at first thought. Those inert atoms in the primeval slime which first began to foreshadow the attributes of life were putting themselves more, and not less, in accord with the fundamental nature of the universe."

The second quotation is by Gustaf Stromberg, noted astronomer on the staff of the Mt. Wilson Observatory from 1917 to 1946: "I believe that behind the physical world we see with our eyes and study in our telescopes and microscopes, and measure with instruments of various kinds, is another, more fundamental realm which cannot be described in physical terms. In this non-physical realm lies the ultimate origin of all things; of energy, matter, organization and life and consciousness. I am convinced that our consciousness is rooted in a world not built of atoms, and that our mind in its facets reflects some of the fundamental characteristics of its origin. Thinking and planning are important characteristics of our mind, and they must then have their origin in a realm beyond our physical selves. But we cannot conceive of thinking and planning without a personality that does the work. In this way we arrive at the idea of an intelligent and ever-active source—the World Soul of certain philosophies, the God of our religion.

"How is organization introduced into the living world? Some twenty years ago it was discovered that in certain

animals the general organization started from a particular point in the embryo, the dorsal lip of the blastopore. From this point a wave of organization appears to spread through the embryo, and its progressing influence can be directly observed as a growth of nerve tissue. Particularly striking are the processes during the metamorphosis of a caterpillar into a butterfly. The field of organization, which during the caterpillar stage determined the structure of its body and the function of its organs, contracts during the pupa stage and disappears, leaving behind a disorganized mass of cells. Then a miracle happens. A field of organization of a new type expands from a particular point in the mass of cells and reorganizes the cell material. The reorganization is accompanied by a growth of a new nervous system, and the final result is the formation of a butterfly.

"These organizing, living fields seem to emerge from 'another world' into the physical world we study in our laboratories. These are strong reasons to believe that at death they disappear into the world from which they came. In recent years extensive studies have been made of these organizing fields, particularly at the department of Neuro-anatomy of the Yale Medical School. All living organisms have been found to be imbedded in complex electrical fields, and these fields disappear at death. Dr. H. S. Burr, the leader of the Yale research group, states that it is hard to escape the conclusion that these fields are independent of the matter involved, and by their innate properties determine the structure and functions of the living organisms.

"Our nerve cells seem to be the links which connect our physical brain with the world in which our consciousness is rooted. At death our brain field is not destroyed.

It contracts and disappears at death, apparently falling back to the level of its origin. All our memories are indelibly engraved in this field, and after death, when our mind is no longer blocked by inert matter, we can probably recall them all, even those of which we were never consciously aware during our life. Our conscience gives us an inkling of what to expect in another realm, where there are pleasure and beauty, as well as sorrow and pain. Thus, it seems to me, are Heaven and Hell indicated by the many discoveries of science."

And one more quotation, this one from the book *Human Destiny*, by the great biochemist Lecomte Du Nouy: "Any effort to visualize God reveals a surprising childishness. We can no more conceive Him than we can conceive an electron. Yet many people do not believe in God simply because they cannot visualize Him. They forget that this incapacity is not, in itself, a proof of nonexistence considering that they firmly believe in the electron. We are in the habit of juggling nowadays with entities known to us only through their effects. These are particles, electrons, protons, neutrons. Individually they are rigorously inconceivable, and physicists who specialize in this branch of science 'forbid' any attempt at visualization. This does not disturb anybody, and their existence is not doubted for an instant. The agnostic and the atheist do not seem to be in the least disturbed by the fact that our entire organized living universe becomes incomprehensible without the hypothesis of God. Their belief in some physical elements of which they know very little has all the earmarks of an irrational faith, but they are not aware of it.

"No matter what our religion, we are all like people at the bottom of a valley who seek to climb a snowy peak

that dominates the others. We all have our eyes fixed on the same goal, and we agree that there is but one summit to reach. Unfortunately, we differ on what road to take. Guides come forward and we follow them. Some go one way, others choose different paths. All are convinced that their trail is the best, and all are sincere. Yet they know that one day, provided they never stop ascending, they must all meet at the top of the mountain and that the road to reach it matters little. Diverse in form modeled by the external conditions, varying according to the climates, adapted to the soil, to the people, to the traditions, religions are all arrayed under a universal rule, the source of which is supernatural and constitutes their reason for existence.

"Let man remember that the Law is, and always has been, to struggle and that the fight has lost nothing of its violence by being transposed from the material onto the spiritual plane. Let him remember that his own dignity, his nobility as a human being, must emerge from his efforts to liberate himself from his bondage and to obey his deepest aspirations. And let him above all never forget that the divine spark is in him, in him alone, and that he is free to disregard it, to kill it, or to come closer to God by showing his eagerness to work with Him, and for Him."

I hope I have not wearied you with these long quotations. To me they are very important, for they show that the more deeply the scientific mind probes into the structure and nature of the universe the more it is confronted by a colossal and all-pervading Intelligence which, called by any name or no name, we instinctively think of as God. And though some scientists and philosophers still insist on labelling this tremendous Intelligence chance, or

anti-chance, or statistical laws, or the blind play of forces inherent in matter, their position is becoming increasingly precarious. Albert Einstein said, "It is enough for me to contemplate the mystery of conscious life perpetuating itself through all eternity, to reflect on the marvelous structure of the universe, which we can dimly perceive, and to try humbly to comprehend even an infinitesimal part of the intelligence manifested in nature." Einstein, great and simple soul that he is, shows in this passage to what height of religious vision one can be led by the method and outlook of science provided one follows, without preconceptions and without egotism, but humbly and earnestly, where she leads.

And now let us take a look at religion. I am using the word here in its more restricted sense, in the sense of organized religions and the theological systems. We see throughout the world a number of major ones, of which Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Judaism, Christianity, and Mohammedanism, to list them in the order of their historical development, are the best known and most widely followed. These major religions we see broken up into subdivisions, such as Vaishnava, Saiva, and Shakta Hinduism, Hinayana and Mahayana Buddhism, Catholic and Protestant Christianity, etc. These subdivisions are in turn broken into smaller ones, as we know so well in the many denominations among Protestants. Indeed the division goes farther and we even have subdivisions of the subdivisions of the subdivisions, such as Methodist Episcopal and Free Methodist (and others), Regular Baptist and Freewill Baptist (and others), United and Associate Reformed Presbyterians (and others). Similar extensive subdivision has developed in other world religions, especially Hinduism.

At first thought it might appear regrettable that religion should be thus divided and subdivided, seeing that the ultimate goal of every form of it is the same. Why, one wonders, could not the peoples of the world, or at least of one country unite in a common approach, in a common method of search for God. But when one remembers the vast differences in the geographical and historical background among peoples, as well as the psychological and spiritual differences among individuals, the reason for all the diversity becomes apparent, and indeed one realizes that it could not be otherwise. For among all the major and minor forms of faith there is something for every individual of every culture, some form of religion to meet the particular needs of each soul, at whatever stage of spiritual progress he may have arrived. The Hindus have long realized this, and although the number of sects among them is very large, "sectarian intolerance among them is almost unknown, diversity of belief being regarded as natural and inevitable." Unfortunately among Christian sects, both Catholic and Protestant, the story is otherwise, with religious intolerance ranging from unwillingness or inability to see the point of view of those who differ from us in matters of belief to actual persecution, which reached its extreme in the tortures and burnings of the Inquisition.

It might appear from the foregoing that I wish to disparage religion. However, it is not religion which is coming under censure, but mankind's limited and shortsighted understanding of its true meaning, and the crimes which have been committed in its name. If one searches with an open mind he can find, in the literature of every world faith the deepest truth and wisdom; in fact he will find that, in spite of minor and unimportant differ-

ences they all bear the same essential message. Dr. Leslie Pickney Hill has reminded us that the Golden Rule appears in the teaching of Confucius in the negative form, though with equal force as compared with the positive form of the Christian version. In the preface to *The World's Great Scriptures,* Lewis Browne quotes no less than eight forms of it from Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, and Mohammedanism, all with exactly the same meaning.

The Golden Rule, of course, expresses one of the two great commandments on which, Jesus said, hang all the law and the prophets. The other is the love of God. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." Thus Jesus put it in one of the most powerful, most deeply penetrating, and most inclusive statements in all the literature of the world. And we will find this first commandment likewise emphasized in the other world religions as the supreme duty, as well as the supreme privilege of man. Sometimes it is expressed as knowing God, or realizing God, but obviously the meaning is the same, for to know God is to love Him, and to love Him truly is to both know and realize Him, and to enter into that peace "which passeth understanding."

In one of the *Upanishads* of the Hindu scriptures it is written, "Only when men shall roll up the sky like a hide will there be an end of misery, unless God has first been known." The *Srimad Bhagavatam* says, "The wise man, leaving all vanity to those who are vain, should strive to

know God, and Him only, before life passes into death." And in the *Bhagavad Gita* or Song Celestial, often called the Sermon on the Mount of Hinduism, we read: "The Lord dwells in the heart of all beings. Take refuge in Him with all thy heart; through His grace thou shalt attain supreme peace and the eternal abode." And, the Lord speaking, "Fill thy heart with Me, be thou devoted to Me, do thou worship Me and bow down to Me. Thus shalt thou attain unto Me. Truly I promise thee, for thou art dear to Me. Giving up all actions, come unto Me alone for refuge. I shall free thee from all sins; grieve not." Rabi'a, a Mohammedan Sufi saint, writes: "God, if I worship Thee in fear of hell, burn me in hell. And if I worship Thee in hope of paradise, exclude me from paradise; but if I worship Thee for Thine own sake, withhold not Thine everlasting Beauty."

These quotations show that, on the two major aims of religion, the great faiths of the world agree. Here are some favorite ones of mine from the *Dhammapada* of the Buddhists: "All that we are is the result of what we have thought; it is founded on our thoughts, it is made up of our thoughts. If a man speaks or acts with an evil thought, pain follows him, as the wheel follows the foot of the ox that draws the carriage. All that we are is the result of what we have thought; it is founded on our thoughts, it is made up of our thoughts. If a man speaks or acts with a pure thought, happiness follows him, like a shadow that never leaves him. 'He abused me, he beat me, he defeated me, he robbed me'—in those who harbor such thoughts, hatred will never cease. For hatred does not cease by hatred at any time; hatred ceases by love—this is an old rule." And: "We live happily indeed, not hating those who hate us! Among men who

hate us we dwell free from hatred! We live happily indeed, free from ailments among the ailing! Among men who are ailing, let us dwell free from ailments! We live happily, indeed, free from greed among the greedy! Among men who are greedy let us dwell free from greed! We live happily indeed, though we call nothing our own! We shall be like the bright gods, feeding on happiness! Victory breeds hatred, for the conquered is unhappy. He who has given up both victory and defeat, he, the contented, is happy."

And here are two passages from the Bible in which the thinking is on the same plane: "And they shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." And: "For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater; so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth. It shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it. For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace; the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree; and it shall be to the Lord for a name, and for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off."

Thus we see that all the great religions are striving after the same goal, and are instructing their adherents in the methods and practices by which this goal can be attained. That many have attained the goal, in every faith, there can be no doubt. No one of them has a mono-

poly of the truth, since all have had access, through their sages and enlightened ones, to the wisdom of the ages, for God has not been partial; and likewise no one of them has a monopoly of error, for we can find error in each, at least in matters of understanding and practice. What we need in this twentieth century, when our world is rapidly becoming one world physically through modern methods of communication and transportation, is sympathetic study and understanding of each other's ways of thinking and worshiping and a sharing of what is good in each, so that our world may indeed become one world spiritually through shared aspirations and beliefs.

I believe that this is possible; in fact I believe that it is inevitable. Many signs point in this direction—the Vedanta centers in our major cities (Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, San Francisco) where swamis of the Ramakrishna Order teach the wisdom of the East, not in order to make converts but in order to increase understanding and build another bridge between the East and West; in the increasing number of books dealing with this subject, by both Western writers and Oriental ones, such as *The Meeting of East and West* by Northrup of Yale University and *The Perennial Philosophy* by Aldous Huxley, and *Hindu Psychology* and *Hindu View of Christ*, both by Swami Akhilananda. Also the publication in this country of such books as Lewis Browne's *The World's Great Scriptures,* Lin Yutang's *The Wisdom of China and India,* and *The Bible of the World,* which gives us firsthand contact with the scriptures of other faiths; and magazines such as *The Message of the East*, formerly published by the Boston Vedanta Centre, but now issued from the Ananda Ashrama, La Crescenta, California, and *Vedanta for the West,* published by

the Vedanta Society of Southern California. Gerald Heard, Aldous Huxley, Christopher Isherwood, and John van Druten are editorial advisers on the staff of the latter and frequently contribute to its pages.

The historian Arnold Toynbee believes that the culture of the future will be an amalgamation of all that is best in both occidental and oriental thought, and that the religion of the future will combine the best features of all. I share this belief, for "Truth is One, men call It by various names," as the Vedas declare; and eventually mankind will become one through recognizing and understanding this oneness which is Truth.

In fact, I will go further and say that I believe that the religion of the future will draw together into itself not only the best religious thought of all the world, but also the principles and generalizations of science and the great contributions of philosophy and the arts, and we shall understand that nothing stands by itself, but that all areas of human thought, rightly interpreted and appreciated, lead toward God and are themselves essentially religious. Then we shall not think of religion as being Protestant or Catholic or Christian or Hindu or Buddhist, but universal. We shall not think of it as embracing one compartment or aspect of our lives, but shall know beyond all doubt that every area of thought and every worthy human endeavor contribute to our better knowledge of that God who upholds the universe and in Whom we all "live and move and have our being."

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What the metaphysicians call "being" the physicist calls "matter," but there is no real fight between the two, for both are one. Though an atom is invisible, unthinkable, yet in it are the whole power and potency of the universe. —*Swami Vivekananda*

# FROM A DISCIPLE'S NOTEBOOK

(Continued from the Winter Issue)

One November morning in the year 1926, a train approached the station at Glendale, California. Among the usual run of people gathered to meet it was a fairly large group of members from the Ananda Ashrama—Brothers and Sisters and their friends—standing at a strategic point, so that as the long line of cars slid by, they could command a view of both ends and the middle. For there was no telling from which Pullman exit the one for whom they waited would emerge and they must be right at hand to assist him and to welcome him with all the fulness of joy that was in their hearts.

Suddenly the engine was upon them with a rush and a roar, and a wind that blew dust into their eyes. There was a confused impression of porters and passengers, waving hands and piled up luggage; then the speed lessened and the big limited gradually came to a halt. All this the disciple sensed rather than saw, for her heart, her mind, her eyes were set for one fair sight alone—the Swami, slender and smiling; the Swami, back from his long trip to India—home once more!

And suddenly there he was, above them on the car platform—descending the steps—coming toward them, with someone at his side. Deep down in her subconscious the disciple knew that it was his young niece, Gayatri Devi, whom he was bringing back with him to join the work; but her conscious attention was only for him. She moved forward to welcome him as if she were drawn by a magnet, but he did not at once acknowledge her welcome. Before her hand could touch his, and even as she eagerly spoke his name, he said: "Are you not going to greet Gayatri?" At that, she turned and gazed into the

biggest pair of brown eyes, shadowed by the longest lashes she had ever seen. Even to this day Gayatri Devi's irrepressible humor bubbles up as she playfully mimics the disciple's entranced expression and the Swami's quiet reminder that awoke her from her trance.

The coming of Gayatri Devi marked a new era in the Swami's work, another step toward the fulfilment of his dream. It had long been his wish to represent in his work a unified spirit, a balance between East and West, in which the material and the spiritual, the mystic and the practical would supplement one another. Especially it had been his desire to be instrumental in bringing together the women of the Orient and Occident in mutual friendship and understanding. Now through the advent of this young Hindu girl the way had opened.

By her own nature and inclination, Gayatri Devi fitted admirably into this picture of happy oneness. Finely wrought, imaginative and spiritually vital, she was yet blessed with rare common sense, also a lofty intelligence, and an unshakable strength which, in later years, was to grow into an unusual executive power. She seemed indeed predestined for her pioneer task, for when she was still only a child, she had written the Swami a remarkable letter in which she had set forth her longing to take up the spiritual life under his guidance. The disciple can never forget that letter—its deep appeal, its clear logic, its masterly presentation of her case. Always she had hoped that the request one day could be granted, and now the day was here.

It was thus something far deeper than mere family relationship which determined the Swami to open the Ashrama gates to this ardent spirit. There was to be a blending, a great experiment, by which all national and

racial differences were to be transmuted into harmony through the alchemy of love.

From the very first day there was no lack of love. Gayatri Devi, though a young woman in years, seemed like a beautiful child to her Western sisters. There was about her a spontaneity, a freshness, a naturalness which, when her first shyness wore off, and even because of that first shyness, proved a pleasing contrast to the more sophisticated ways of American youth. She became the Ashrama baby, as it were, and delighted every heart with her quick wit and her spirit of fun. Her English was exceptional, although she had had little chance to practice it in India. Of course there were occasional mistakes, but even these had a flavor all their own, as, for instance, when on a visit to a Lion Farm, she exclaimed: "Oh, see that baby lion itching itself! Its eyes have just blossomed!"

More intimate knowledge of her life and ideas came by degrees. In the meantime, she moved through the Ashrama like a spirit of the woods, her bare, unspoiled feet thrust into her Indian sandals (or kicking them off), her cheeks glowing from the warmth of the sun, her hair falling in soft waves around her face. Considering her Indian background, the things dear and precious left behind for an indefinite time, the closely-knit home life of which she had been an integral part, considering all these things and many more, intangible but potent, her adjustment to the new way of living was remarkable. This was due, no doubt, to her own will and adaptability, but those who watched knew that it was the Swami's love and wisdom that helped her over the rough places. Where he was, there was India; there were father and mother, friends and family. Even when he went away his spirit remained.

It permeated the Ashrama, the worship in the shrine, the public Services, and was present in the feeling of sanctity with which even the small, daily tasks were performed. Everything bore his touch and helped to create the illusion of his presence.

The Swami, however, very seldom left Gayatri Devi behind in those days. When he went east she went with him, and when he returned, she too came back. He was like a mother bird protecting a fledgling. Yet this fledgling was no feeble featherling. Her strong nature and discriminative mind, not yet warmed and tempered by the Swami's mature and loving spirit, sometimes flashed forth to the detriment of an opponent when some discussion was in progress. A verse in the Ashrama "Song of the Goblin Army" gives a picture of her at this stage.

"Came a little maid from Dacca
Who most dearly loves her kaka*—
She's a first fruit from a fine old family tree.
Oh, she is so gentle seeming—
Big eyes make you think she's dreaming—
But she's warrior caste is little Gayatri!"

One of the disciple's most rewarding memories, redolent of the Swami's wisdom and tenderness, is concerned with his nurturing of Gayatri Devi's inner being. By his own rare magic, a certain self-will and tendency to rebellion on her part were directed by him along high and constructive channels. The result was akin to the blooming of an exquisite flower, no longer closing itself in with its petals, but rather opening the treasure of its heart to the whole world.

If the disciple could only precipitate upon the page a moving picture of life at the Ashrama as it was then, there would be no need of words. The lofty idealism which the Swami embodied was in the very air. Every-

* The Bengali term for uncle

one felt it. There was Dr. Kalidas Nag, for instance, a true devotee as well as a distinguished archæologist, who came as a one-night guest to the Ashrama. The following morning as he sat with the Ashrama members on the front terrace, the Swami spoke to them spontaneously on Great Truth and Its relation to daily living, his thoughts and words flowing together in an unstudied beauty of utterance. When he had ended, Dr. Nag was wiping tears from his eyes. "This," he said, "is the way Vedic teaching was given in ancient India. Rarely does one find it given that way nowadays. It has been a wonderful experience!" He then proceeded to address the assembled household, interpreting for them most vividly the significance of the ancient Ashramas or Forest Hermitages of India, under whose influence men not only found their connection with one another, but with all created things. Even the tree they cut down and the water they drew spoke to them of oneness. As he travelled over the modern world, he said, he found that it was very much like a spiritual desert, so that a place like the Ashrama was indeed an oasis.

The very nature of the Ashrama invited to gatherings out under the open sky, where the sun, like a golden lotus, floated on its lake of heavenly blue, and the wind in the trees, plus the buzzing of the bees, brought to the ears what seemed like an intoning of the sacred AUM.

The Swami seldom could resist this invitation. More and more there were out-of-door Services, the Swami speaking Sunday mornings from beneath a spreading acacia tree whose golden plumes formed a fluffy canopy over his head, or occasionally, at night, from the portico of the temple, or from the little stone platform alongside the fireplace in the temple patio.

There were also open-air pageants or dramatic episodes of a holy nature. One of these, in the Cloister patio, abides in memory with all its charm and color. Under a green plush canopy, placed beneath the trees, Prince Siddartha, the Buddha to be, is seated disconsolate. It is night and he has just returned from a trip to his city. Near him, at his feet, beautiful Yashodara seeks to lure his thoughts away from the memory of the three dread sights of death, old age and pain, which he has just beheld for the first time. She commands trays of luscious fruits to be placed before him by the court attendants who also try to charm him with song and dance. Nothing, however, not even Yashodara's heart-broken appeal, can make him forget the anguish of the world and his own deep resolve of renunciation.

On another evening, in the same setting, but without the plush canopy, the Swami and Gayatri Devi enacted the lovely scene from the "Light of Asia," wherein Siddartha, near to death because of his austerities, is revived by milk-rice, brought in gratitude by a young mother, who takes him for the wood god to whom she has prayed for a son. Following her exit, Siddartha goes into the deep meditation which culminates in his Nirvana.

As the Swami sat there in the meditation posture, silent and serene, with the rays of the moon flooding his face and figure, the spiritual impression was so authentic that those commissioned to draw the curtains could not bring themselves to do so. As a result, there was a long space in which no one moved and everyone waited. Finally the curtain-pullers came to their senses and brought the scene to a close. Afterwards the Swami scolded them a little, for he was a perfectionist and liked everything to be well and accurately done. But his concern was for the aud-

ience, not for himself. He was always completely spontaneous, and in the role of the Buddha, no doubt was really meditating, and not just assuming a pose.

This same spontaneity made it difficult for him to follow a rigid pattern or even to memorize set lines. On this particular evening, at the opening of the scene, he was supposed to say: "Alone, alone! O empty, speechless sky! What is it I am seeking, and for whom? No answer—nothingness—alone!" It had been impressed upon him that to improvise would be to deprive Gayatri Devi of her entrance cue, therefore he strove to be word-perfect. For about two days before the performance, anyone coming suddenly into a room where the Swami was sitting alone, would find him gazing pensively into space, repeating in a mournful tone: "Alone, alone!" and so forth to the end of the line. Nevertheless the disciple was not going to take any chances, so to be quite sure that at the crucial moment he would not be carried away on a flood of inspiration, she concealed herself near him, under some bushes, ready to prompt him *sotto voce,* should the need arise. But happily there was no need.

A few years after Gayatri Devi's arrival at the Ashrama, two of her younger sisters and a young cousin joined her there. The Swami had high hopes that they too would become permanent members of his community; but this apparently was not in their destiny. They did remain, however, for several years, and added their quota to the universal atmosphere which the Swami was ever seeking to create. He took pride in these girls, and in their older sister, and when anyone attempted to discredit the fair name of the Motherland—as, for instance, Miss Mayo in her book, *Mother India*—he would point to them and say, "These are my answer."

Their songs, their exuberance, their endearing, sometimes maddening, ways quickly dispelled any sense of strangeness and opened still wider the door into India's heart—her human heart. For many an hour, one or the other of them would pour into some sympathetic Western ear little details of their home-life in Bengal. Gayatri Devi and her sisters would speak of the strength and wisdom of their mother, the sterling character of their father and his solicitude and love for them. Many a night, they said, he would arise and tiptoe into their rooms in order to make sure that they were adequately covered, were safe and warm. Then there were anecdotes about small brothers and sisters, amusing and typical of children everywhere. Small, inconsequential details maybe, but how unifying and full of humanness!

The cousin, on her part, would describe her life at Shantiniketan, Rabindranath Tagore's great school, where her father, now dead, had been his most valued assistant. She gave vivid pictures of the Poet's life, and told how night after night she would see the light in his quarters burning till the dawn, while great poems poured from his soul. Yet he never seemed to show fatigue, she said. Especially she talked about his great solicitude for her, how he loved and cherished her and strove to protect her in every way. "And I," she admitted, "paid him back with naughtiness, refusing to do the things he wanted me to do, and forcing him to plead with me when he wanted me to take part in one of his plays." Many mistakes, many hopes, many dreams were confessed in this way, and oceans of separateness bridged by the clasp of one small hand.

The illumined gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, the flaming life and words of Swami Vivekananda, the living ex-

ample of Swami Paramananda, plus of course the great sacred literature of India, such as the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Upanishads,* had established for the Western workers the great Vedic ideal. Gayatri Devi and the other little Hindu maidens, helped by their presence to prove the possibility of its practical application. Crossing the "dark waters" on the bridge of love which the Swami had built, they verified (Mr. Kipling to the contrary, and with apologies to him) that "West is East and East is West; since the two now meet and blend; For there is neither East nor West, Where friend embraces friend!"

Gayatri Devi stands today a wise, dedicated and mature woman, wholly integrated with the Swami's work and ideals. The younger sisters and the cousin have gone their separate ways, but the disciple thinks of them always as children of the Swami's spirit, who now carry abroad his message of love and peace. The disciple still sees them, one and all, as they were then—India's young womanhood in the form of Gayatri, Sita, Lila and Sumita—moving freely and gracefully in their colorful Indian *saris*—sometimes eating luncheon from little trays out on the Cloister terrace or in the patio; sometimes stretched out on the grass, enjoying the warmth of the sun, or at nightfall seated around the Swami before the living room fire; singing together, at his request, this or that sacred song from their Motherland—*Ram, Ram, Sita-Ram,* the lovely *Song of Mirabai,* or the rollicking air of Lord Shiva, in which all the Ashrama members joined.

There was fun and laughter. For was it not the household of Divine Mother? Occasionally there were banquets and celebrations. But these were toys to please Her little ones. At children's parties, the father or mother often joins the play. So the Swami played in the name of the

greatest Mother of all. Yet not for one moment did he allow the play to turn his gaze from the one Supreme Goal. With every word and look and by his mere presence, he reminded those around him that there were ideals to be realized here and now—ideals of service and selflessness. There was humility to be practiced, and, above all, there was love, to heal all wounds, to redeem all mistakes. Under his ethereal touch the most prosaic activities took on a more profound meaning, and even parties and pageants sounded the deep, eternal note.

Many people! Many events! Too many for the disciple to capture in her small net. There is one person, however, who stands out clearly defined—Charushila Devi—the Swami's cousin and childhood friend. This diminutive Hindu lady, with a great soul, came to America in April, 1928 and went back to India at the close of 1930, the two years being divided between the Ashrama at La Crescenta and the Vedanta Centre of Boston. Her sojourn was all too brief, yet had it been ten times as long it would not have seemed long enough. Her simple, childlike nature endeared her to everyone she met, while her strength, wisdom and steadfast devotion won for her an abiding respect which has grown with the years. India too pays her homage for what she is and for what she has accomplished. For by the sole virtue of her own character and her undaunted faith, she has succeeded in glorifying her ideal in terms of splendid service to the women of her land. But this story must await another chapter.

Thou has made me known to friends whom I knew not. Thou hast given me seats in homes not my own. Thou hast brought the distant near and made a brother of the stranger. —*Tagore*

# REPORT

## ANANDA ASHRAMA, LA CRESCENTA, CALIFORNIA

The year of 1953 marks the centennial of the birth of Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother. Among the Winter activities of the California Ashrama was the celebration of this sacred birthday when, on Sunday, December 7th, Services were dedicated to her as the embodiment of India's ideal of womanhood and of spirituality.

Christmas brought its special blessing to the Ashrama household and to all friends. There were Christmas Services in the temple of the Universal Spirit on the morning and afternoon of Dec. 21st, while a special Christmas Eve Service was conducted on the afternoon of the 24th.

The New Year's Eve Service was held, as always, just before midnight, December 31st. The Altar was radiant with white flowers, white candles and vigils symbolizing the new page to which we turn at the New Year.

The season of Holy Birthdays, which marks the first of the year, was celebrated with the flowering of an early Spring at La Crescenta. First, on January 11th the Great Swami Vivekananda was honored with special services. On January 31st the birthday of Swami Paramananda was observed with equal earnestness of devotion and two weeks later, on February 14th, came the culmination when the Services were humbly dedicated to Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master.

## VEDANTA CENTRE, ANANDA ASHRAMA, COHASSET, MASS.

During Gayatri Devi's absence in India, devoted resident and non-resident members have faithfully carried on the work in Cohasset and Boston. The Sunday services, held in Boston, have been conducted with rare feeling by Miss Nora Shaw, while Tuesday classes are held at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Frederick Langenbach. A fuller report will be given in the next issue.